THE WALLFLOWER—*Adventure and Romance in This Story*—By Rupert Hughes

AT Prue Nickerson's party Prue was the prettiest thing going. And Idelane Nobbin was the homeliest thing sitting still.

Prue was kept busy trying to be both hostess to the incoming guests and armful of beauty to the youth that fought for her dances. There were more men than maidens there, but none of the men would risk a bout with Idalene, who sat alone on the long row of empty chairs and tried to look as if she were utterly happy and had never expected to be asked to dance.

The caldron of the dance had not been stirring long when the guest of honor arrived. Phineas Larabee, one of the few Calverly boys who had been sent away to college, had brought back with him for the vacation no less a person than Roy Duncan, the foot ball captain of the team at Gramlin.

There was a wild flutter among the Calverly girls when he came into the hall. Prue left the dance and ran to greet the great visitor. They met at the banister post and Phineas introduced the two with pride in both, for Roy was his friend and Prue was his sweetheart. It gave him an acute moment of anxiety to note the instant mutual attraction of the brave and the belle. Phineas haled Roy upstairs as fast as he could, but not before Roy had gained the promise of the next dance. Prue, realizing the value of making herself difficult, had accepted the proffer of another swain.

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PHIN was perfidious enough to plan Roy's humiliation and he said: "You don't want to miss this one-step. I'll give you a knockdown to the best little dancer in this burg." He led Roy to the long reef of chairs where Idalene sat marooned. Phin mumbled an introduction and Roy asked for the honor of a dance with all the flourish of Gramlin. Idalene swooned upward to her feet and collapsed into his arms. Then the duel began. Roy stepped on Idalene's toes, found her instep under his heel when it should have been far away; crossed shins with her painfully; started in one direction as she flung off the other way.

He had not wrestled long before he realized that the rest of the dancers were watching him with delight. Phin was hung to the balustrade of the stairway and rocking with laughter. Even Prue was snickering into the bosom of her grinning swain.

When the dance was over Roy deposited Idalene in her chair, and thanked her effusively for the pleasure of the dance. Then he excused himself and went in pursuit of Phin. He could not find the traitor, who kept out of sight, until the next dance when he appeared with Prue in his arms. Roy cut in at once and used his giant's strength to drag Phin's arms from Prue and take her to his own.

Oh, the contrast! Prue was round and rosy and all alit with grace. He wanted the next dance and the next, but she was alive both to the duties of a hostess and the wiles of a siren. She introduced him to a dozen other girls, made him share her dances with them, and drove him frantic with her elusiveness.

Idalene's brief ecsstasy was not repeated. Roy came near her no more, and nobody else asked her to dance. When refreshment time came, no one fought for her at the dining room table; no one fetched her chicken salad or ice cream and cake. Her wallflower smile was a burden to her tired muscles. She longed to dart from the room and run home where she could cry in secret. But she had not the courage of her cowardice.

Phin and Roy were in the upstairs room again, getting their hats for departure. Roy had said: "I never can remember names. But I'm going to invite that peacherine to the Junior Prom. Just what was her name? Prue—something wasn't it?"

Phin had planned to take Prue as his own guest to the most brilliant social affair of the Gramlin season. He answered:

"Prue, That was Prue you danced with first."

"Oh, Lord, that scrambled egg? Whew!"

"The girl you mean is named Idalene Nobbin." Phin lied on and spelled the name out as Roy wrote it on his cuff.

When the postman left an envelope bearing the name "Miss Idalene Nobbin," Idalene opened it with tremulous thumby fingers.

She held the letter out for whoso would to read, with a feeling of majesty. The mother and the two brothers read the letter aloud as a trio:

Dear Miss Nobbin—Although you may have forgotten me, I will never forget our dancing together. I should be highly honored if you and your mother would be my guests at the Junior Prom on the 16th of this mo. I have reserved rooms for you at the best boarding house. Please don't fail!

Yours as ever,
ROY DUNCAN.

Idalene and her mother went for the first time to the swellest dressmaker in town, Madamzel Dooley, whose lair was called on the window "Ye L'Art Shoppe." Mrs. Nobbin hoped to knock off several dollars by calling Madamzel by her unprofessional name.

"Hah ta do, Mariar; right hot, ain't it? Yes, that's so. Well, say, Mariar, Idalene's invited to the Junior Prom over at Gramlin, and we was thinkin' maybe you'd have something suitable and not too expensive, o' course. Idalene's got some nice clo'es, o' course, but we thought if you had any bargains, why, we might—anyway, it won't hurt to see what you got."

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THEY found in a corner of one wardrobe a fabrication whose colors seemed to have fermented with age and whose artless embroideries were like sour froth about it. Idalene stepped into seclusion and emerged with the gown upon her. She was so buoyed up with its beauty that she "floated" in, feeling like another "sumptuous Delilah." Mrs. Nobbin was already bargaining:

"If you could make this dress fit—and the price, too—why, I might take it."

When Idalene and her mother left the shop on the sidewalk outside they met Prue Nickerson. Prue was stupidly cruel enough to say:

"Hello, Idalene, you going to work for Madamzel?"

Mrs. Nobbin's retort was even more punishing than Prue's:

"Idalene's invited to the prom by Roy Duncan, and she's just been gettin' the best dress in town."

A little private earthquake shivered the ground under Prue's feet.

When the passenger train finally drew into the station and poured out its cargo of beauties and their mothers, Roy dashed forward at the auroral sight of Prue and greeted her with rapture:

"Oh, there you are, Miss Nobbin! Mighty nice of you to come."

Prue answered as icily as her soft, warm mouth would permit: "Miss Nobbin and her mother are just back of me!"

Roy was a hero and had learned to brace himself against the onset of eleven men at once. He braced himself now and held hard. He repeated his oration, "Oh, there you are, Miss Nobbin! Mighty nice of you to come."

NO ONE FETCHED HER CHICKEN SALAD OR ICE CREAM.

"Mighty nicer of you to ast me," simpered Idalene. "This is momma. Momma, this is Mr. Duncan."

"Pleased to meet cha," said Mrs. Nobbin.

Roy preceded his guests as if he were their captured slave and led them to a waiting hack. When the door had closed on their guests, leaving Roy and Phin alone on the porch, Phin saw in Roy's eye a look that sent him off the porch at a quickstep. After a vain chase along the street and across the campus, Roy gave up and went to his rooms.

Dance cards were still used at the Gramlin proms, and Roy had Idalene's card with him. He set out among the rooms to sell Iralene's dances. He bribed the men in various ways. Some of them demanded cash, and when Roy returned to his room to dress he still had a number of blanks unfilled. While he was bedecking his noble form he was called upon by one of the best dancers in college, the leading social figure, no less a personage than Allen Lansing. Like many another aristocrat, Lansing was in financial straits. Roy desperately offered him money. A white bull pup that blinked at the proceedings engaged Lansing's fancy and he said:

"I'll sell myself for five dances for the bull pup."

When Roy called at the boarding house for Idalene, he found Phin in the parlor, grinning anxiously and pleading: "This is neutral ground and I got my fingers crossed."

When Idalene came down, looking infinitely worse than ever, Roy needed all his resolution to keep from leaping through the window. When Prue drifted in like a nymph the only thing that saved him from murdering Phin was "the presence of the ladies."

It was martyrdom to march Idalene and her mother into the bunting-festooned gymnasium, thronged with the prettiest girls obtainable, regardless of expense or distance. Roy could see that Idalene was a sensation. The crowd opened before her like a Red sea to let her through. Those in front stared with startled smiles that became snickers after she passed. Then Roy had her on his hands (and feet) for the first dance.

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THE youth who had signed up for the second dance did not call for it, and Roy had to hunt him down and menace him with a twisted neck if he welched. Allen Lansing had missed Idalene's grand entry and arrived in time for the third dance. He saluted Roy and said:

"Private Lansing, Company A, reports as orderly, sir."

Roy pointed dismally at Idalene, who sat puffing as a result of her long wrestle with her exhausted partner, and groaned: "There she blows!"

Lansing went to his fate with the grim elegance of a French aristocrat advancing to the guillotine. Roy paused to warn Job Wolfert, the next mortgagee, that if he failed to carry out his dance with Idalene he would never make the foot ball eleven.

"All right, cap. I'll practice on your Idalene. But she runs mean, and she's a hard one to tackle."

Roy cut in on Phin, and Prue followed him trustingly into the moonlight, where he told her of Phin's perjurous treachery and his own thwarted effort to have her as his guest.

Joe Wolfert, the ambitious foot ball candidate, saw that Roy was absent, and was suddenly inspired to dance right into a group of idlers and force Idalene upon one of them. Poor Lansing suddenly heard Wolfert at his elbow saying: "Say, old man, I'm going to give you the rest of this dance. I've got a nosebleed."

He had the unheard of audacity to wrap Lansing's arm around Idalene and hurry away with his handkerchief to his nose. During one of the brief intermissions Lansing dug up his last two-dollar bill and palmed it. When Idalene crept into his bosom to resume the dance, she never dreamed that behind her back his right hand held out the banknote, waving it as a signal of distress and a reward to any one who would take his place. A two-dollar bill was a fortune to most of the Gramlin cubs, but none of them would even look at the bait with Idalene as the all too visible hook, line and sinker.

Wickham, the next victim, was the best actor in the college dramatic club, and he threw into his eyes all the amorous calcium he had as he murmured into Idalene's ears: "The moonlight is maddeningly beautiful tonight, Miss Nobbin. Would you gaze on it with me "

He found Idalene a seat in the dark, and hid himself in the gloom at her side. A few difficult efforts convinced him that Idalene had no more conversation than she had grace or beauty. Wickham tried to think of a good exit line, but he was an actor, not an author, and his ingenuity collaborating with his desperation finally took him off the scene with a pitiful:

"Excuse me a minute; I forgot something."

He forgot to come back.

Idalene was glad to be alone for a while to revel in the heaven of the new life she had watched from afar and only now begun. She was content to sit in the divine gloom and build a future out of the velvet of her little past. She saw Roy Duncan coming across the lawn with Prue Nickerson glued to his arm and their heads so close together that they walked blindly into the light pouring from the window at Idalene's elbow. Before she could make up her mind how dangerous this omen was, Allen Lansing appeared and advanced on Roy Duncan in a rage. Idalene wondered if he were jealous of Prue, but her suspense was brief. He dragged Roy aside with little ceremony, close to the unseen Idalene, and snapped at him:

"Look here, Duncan, all bets are off! You can have your dog and your Idalene. I'm through!"

Roy clutched him and held him fast, grumbling:

"Wait a minute; wait a minute! You took my dog and you're going to keep your contract."

"Oh, no, I'm not!" Lansing answered. "You played me for a sucker. You never told me your Idalene was the homeliest looker and the worse dancer in the history of the world. Why, the other men wouldn't even cut in when I held a two-dollar bill behind her back. Enough's enough and too much is a plenty! Good night!"

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AND he departed. Idalene's soul was quenched utterly. When Phin Larabee came along looking for Prue and seeing that some girl sat in the shadow, lighted a match and held it close to her, he was appalled by the mask of agony he saw painted before him.

"Why, Idalene!" he gasped. "You—you—I'd better send your mother to you, hadn't I?"

"No!" she answered in such a voice as might issue from some old skull. "I'm all right. I'm just thinking! Go on away and leave me alone!"

Much troubled, he slowly made his way to Mrs. Nobbin. After long hesitation, he said:

"I don't want to worry you, Miz Nobbin, but Idalene's out there, and she looks kind of sick or something."

Mrs. Nobbin supposed that Idalene's success had been too much for her, and she asked Phin to take her to her daughter.

When they reached the spot Idalene was gone. She had nowhere to go but out. Just out. Her muscles raised her to her feet. Her feet wanted to run. They ran.

Gramlin was not a large town. She was soon out of it. On the road she followed grimly, motor cars flashed by and whipped her with beams of blinging light. People stared, horns honked. One or two voices called to her. She turned off into a field, plunging through thistles, scrambling over bowlders, falling, getting up. By and by the road curved round and confronted her again, winding through a cut in the hill. She dropped exhausted on the edge of the top of the slope.

Two dollars and a bull pup!

She wasn't worth it!

She slid and hobbled down the gravelly incline. A jutting mud bank hid her from the approaching automobiles. Their rays of light came round it like feelers; then the cars followed, huge blundering beetles zooming by.

She flinched from the first one and the second. She could not bring herself to hurl herself under their wheels. But at length she felt that she could crawl to her destiny. She heard drunken song approaching. A crowd of rioters was running amuck. The driver's wheel hand was soberer than his brain. It guided the car around the curve while he turned to add his boozy tenor to the harmony.

He did not notice the bump that jolted an extra hiccup out of him. The road was full of bumps. The car vanished round the curve, taking the light with it. Idalene had felt the crushing blow of a front wheel, but not the weight of the rear.

After a time another car sent its light around the curve. The driver, alert, jammed on the whining brakes and swerved to a stop alongside the dark form. The headlight on the windshield was brought to bear on Idalene. She did not see it or hear the voices of the man and woman who leaped out and knelt to stare at her.

Another car shooting around the curve came near erasing all three, but Dr. Breen thrust Pamela Shiel back with one arm and hauled Idalene's body out of the way with the other just in time.

The next Idalene knew she was lying on a long velvet cushion in a high-arched chamber hung with curtains like woven jewels. Somebody who might have been an angel was leaning over her. Her wonder drugged her torture and she sighed:

"I got to heaven, after all!"

The angel spoke with angelic tenderness:

"Not yet. But you've got to go through the other place. Both your legs are broken and setting them won't be much fun."

Then she heard another angel, a tall woman angel with a halo in her hair, cry:

"Oh, she's the little girl we saw at the dance!"

Idalene shrieked hysterically: "I'm the one they were all laughing at. There was a bull pup—and two dollars! Two dollars—a pup—a pup——"

At length Idalene grew used to the rigid stocks of the plaster casts and could study the incredible graces of her bedroom and her bed. Pamela Shiel's home was a masterpiece of the builder's art, as she herself was a masterpiece of human architecture, its decoration and management.

She and her house guest, Dr. Walt Breen, had gone to the junior prom as lookers-on. They had seen Idalene laughed at, and Pamela had dragged Walt away to keep him from knocking together the heads of the riotous bystanders.

Pamela's heart ached as the village wallflower poured out the history of her self-disdain. When Idalene's terrified mother was fetched, Pamela's mother cooked up a story that saved Idalene from confessing her attempt at anything so melodramatic as suicide.

They kept the girl a prisoner of luxury until her bones were healed and had demonstrated their ability to resume their offices. Then Idalene was shipped back to her dismal fate. Some people are homesickest when they get back home. Idalene was woefully homesick. Her little revolt had failed. Her dash for liberty had ended in a return to the penitentiary where she must serve a life sentence within the gray walls of loveless, husbandless, childless inahity.

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PAMELA SHIEL hated to be baffled.

Soon after Idalene left the house filled with guests, friends of her father and mother and friends of her own. But she could not get Idalene out of her mind. To give her wealth, beauty, grace, suitors was beyond Pamela's abilities. She was not a goddess. But on an afternoon she spoke of her while she was sauntering in the garden with Walt Breen, a kind of distant relative and ambiguous between lover and friend. They came upon a tribe of roses in full glory.

One of them, the queen of them all, was aglow with beauty. As they marveled at it, Breen noted far down in the dark bush, pressed against the wall in a perpetual twilight, one stunted, crinkled dwarf with shabby and tarnished petals. He thrust his hand down and plucked it. Pamela sighed over the pathos of it.

"Poor little waif, what makes it so wretched?"

"It's starved for sunlight," said Breen. "This big empress here has been flooded with it, while this unlucky member of the same family got none at all. It's like the difference between you and—and—Idalene."

This was a bit tactless. It implied that Pamela was what she was because of her unbroken good luck. But, then, Walt was tactless and proud of it. He had not even realized the blow he had dealt. He was pondering aloud: "I wonder if—no, I suppose not. Still——"

Pamela read the undercurrent of his thoughts. "You mean you wonder what would happen if we flooded Idalene with sunlight?"

He looked at her, a little startled by her intuition. He nodded. She spoke up: "Let's."

This was too quick for his slow methods.

"It might kill her. Transplanting from the shade to the full light is dangerous."

"Let's risk it. Better die of too much sunshine than never know any of it."

The next afternoon Pamela and Breen motored to the Nobbin home.

"IT'S STARVED FOR SUNLIGHT," SAID BREEN. "THE BIG ROSE HAS BEEN FLOODED WITH IT. IT'S LIKE YOU AND IDALENE."

Mrs. Nobbin asked them to sit down a minute "whilst she run up and told Idalene, who wa'n't very spry on her limbs just yet."

When she told Idalene of her swell callers, the ungrateful girl actually began to crumple up her chin and pucker her eyes and whimper. She was thinking of the grand times she had had in their society and it emphasized her present woe.

"You'd ought to be ashamed of yourself," her mother stormed. "You'd ought to thank your stars you're alive a tall."

"Why?"

A terrible word. "Why?"—a word of unsubmissive atheism, questioning Heaven's wisdom and goodness. Mrs. Nobbin was aghast before it as before a blasphemy.

"You wicked, ungrateful girl!" she raged. "What under the shinin' heavens has got into you?"

"I'm just mis'ble, that's all."

"What of it? We're not put on earth to have a good time. You've got no right to be happy. Nobody has."

Unannounced and unheard, Pamela came into the room. She greeted Idalene with a kiss and a pat, then turned to Mrs. Nobbin to justify the visit.

"We've been thinking that Idalene ought to have a change of scene—life, travel. She ought to go to some bright place."

Mrs. Nobbin answered that with ease: "If we could have afforded trips and bright places, I'd 'a' went there myself."

Pamela had a moment's understanding of the doleful lot of such women who have no hope, no youth, no prospect of charm. But Mrs. Nobbin was beyond her reach. There was still a gambling chance for the daughter. Pamela explained that she had come to bundle up Idalene and take her home for a visit. Idalene began to cry. But these tears were rather April's rain than November's.

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THE guests at the Shiel home were lounging about the terrace when Pamela and Walt returned with their prey. When Idalene had been sent up to her room, Pamela returned to her guests. The majestic Miss Trevor voiced the question the others felt:

"What's that you brought with you—a new kitchenmaid?"

"That's our star guest," said Pamela. "I want you people to quit making love to each other and make love to her. She's a poor little Cinderella I've pulled out of the ashes. She needs flattery and flirtation and attention; and that's your program for the next few days."

Men and women were alike delighted. They were all decent, kind-hearted souls or Pamela would not have had them as friends. Idalene would be a new toy, and her cultivation an odd twist to the old business of gallantry.

Having given her orders, Pamela went back to Idalene. The gifted and versatile Ninette was already at work upon her with all the ancient and modern arts of beauty. Idalene looked up from a ferocious shampoo, her eyes filled with soap. After her hair had been washed, dried, brilliantined and put up for further attention, her skin was smeared with cold cream and stimulated with lotions, rubbed with ice, massaged and pinched and pulled; her eyebrows and eyelashes were minutely regulated, her hands and nails brought to their best.

Then Pamela took her by her shoulders and taught her to sit right, stand right, walk with easy pride. These lessons could not be mastered at once by the slovenly muscles, but Idalene acquired a new idea of the beauty of carriage. Then the maid began to reform Idalene's hair. Ninette dealt with it as a master goldsmith might who wreathed a coronet for a duchess out of drawn gold. Idalene gazed at the stranger in her mirror and murmured, "That can't be me!"

"That's only part of you that you've kept buried," said Pamela. "Wait!"

She had selected from her own vast armory of dresses an afternoon frock as simple as a Greek idyll. Skirts had been very short when it was new. They were longer now and the gown was just right for Idalene.

She put Idalene into it, with stockings to match, and topped it with a hat that revised her whole effect as an artist will change the entire appeal of a portrait by a slash or two of the brush.

When Pamela drew her away from the mirror to go down and surprise her guests, Idalene reverted to her usual timidity. She hung back, whispering:

"I'm scared. I don't know how to act before swells."

Pamela laughed at such fears.

"Don't act," she said. "And remember that real swells are just plain people who don't have to act."

Pamela had not told Walt Breen of the plot that she had imposed upon the other guests, and he could hardly believe his eyes when Warren and Eaton, two of the most critical young bloods, stepped forward and vied with each other in paying court to Idalene.

She was completely confused, and with one gallant on either side found herself drifted down the marble steps to the sunken garden.

Breen found a curious jealousy in his heart, the jealousy one feels for his burdens, annoyances and the wards of his charity. He decided that the two men were making fun of Idalene, and that angered him.

By the time he had joined the trio the two men were actually quarreling over Idalene. She was in a seventh heaven of terror, and when Walt came up glowering she almost swooned with the bliss of being fought for. She had forgotten that she had been duped once before, but that was by crass collegians. These were delicate flatterers.

Eaton and Warren retreated from the field and went back to a group of women to brag of their debut. Idalene went happily to her room. Over her shoulder she heard Pamela say to Dr. Breen:

"Walt, do you think it quite fair to me to show such marked attention to Idalene?"

She could not hear Pamela explaining to the puzzled Walt that this jealousy was only a game that everybody was playing. She did not know that it roused Walt to a certain resentment in her behalf. He was of an old and wealthy line, but he cared little for riches or the refinements and distinctions they create. He preferred to live among plain people on a vast western ranch, where he practiced his medical skill on Americans, Mexicans, Indians, horses, cattle and swine with complete equality.

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HE was fascinated by Pamela and had about decided to ask her to marry him and share the primitive conditions his money permitted him. She was tired of her complex life and eager to go with him, waiting only for the exact word.

And now she disappointed him. She seemed to be revealing an unworthy condescension toward Idalene, treating her as a puppet—when she was, after all, a human being with as high a right to dignity as anybody.

There was moonlight that night, following the shadowy glow of the dining room, and Idalene prospered exceedingly. Eaton and Warren wrangled over her as before; their women glared. They danced on the terrace, and Idalene did not do so badly. At least, Eaton and Warren whispered that she was divine, and that helped her to be better than herself. And she had the rapture of being cut in on. Walt would not dance, and he did not somehow enjoy Idalene's success. He found it difficult to get Idalene alone, and when he grumbled a compliment it seemed to alarm her. She seemed to evade him.

She was afraid to let herself love Walt; she was afraid to be seen with him lest it hurt Pamela's feelings. Thus she obtained a sincere elusiveness that gave her a mystic charm in the eyes of Walt, who did not care for beauty to excess, and who felt for Idalene something of what Pygmalion felt for his sculptured Galatea. Walt had not put the finishing touches on Idalene, but he had brought her from the quarry, and he felt an interest in her that no other woman had ever inspired.

She was not beautiful under analysis. She never would be. Her features and her members were not modeled with felicity. Prue Nickerson had been born to all exquisiteness of line and color and rhythm. But Prue thought silly, selfish thoughts, and though she would get lovers and a husband all too easily, she would not hold them long.

The earlier Idalene had also thought silly, selfish, man hunting thoughts. Now she thought of beauty and the graces of the spirit. Her soul was playing upon her body as a master would play a masterpiece upon an ordinary violin. Prue's soul was wasting her resources as a cheap fiddler would make a Stradivarius rattle with a jig.

Idalene, like most women, responded to the opportunity for physical self-improvement with lightninglike rapidity. Hardly a week had passed when Pamela felt that she was ready to take revenge on the callow youth who had broken Idalene's heart at the junior prom.

The Shiel home was not far from the college, and invitations were rare enough not to conflict. Roy Duncan, Allen Lansing, Phin Larrabee, and one or two others accepted with wild enthusiasm. They were not forewarned that Idalene was to be a guest. They did not recognize her in the upstanding, lithe, smart triumph of fashion that greeted them by name, though they pretended hastily that they remembered perfectly.

Roy Duncan repeated to Phin Larrabee his motto: "I'm a rotten name rememberer. Who is that pippin anyway?"

Phin stared and stared, and then he gasped: "Lord help us, it's Idalene!"

The Gramlin beau, Allen Lansing, was dancing with her at the time and finding her perfection. He was sighing into the ear beneath her royal coiffure: "You dance like a dream of delight. Miss—Miss——"

Idalene murmured up under his chin: "This dance earns you the bull pup."

Lansing stopped short and accepted the jolts of passing dancers as he floundered: "I don't understand."

Idalene explained, with almost voluptuous malice: "Roy Duncan promised you his bull pup if you would dance with me again. This is again."

Lansing made a magnificent recovery: "No, I was to dance with you three times more, and I'll hold you to the bargain."

Walt Breen noted darkly that Allen Lansing took three dances with Idalene. He was jealous now, without subtlety or compassion. He had a frenzy for monopoly. When the last house guest had gone up to bed and the last extramural guest was far along the road, Walt checked Idalene as she checked a yawn of replete contentment. He dragged her back to the terrace for a glimpse of the moon and he growled: "You were wonderful tonight."

"Me wonderful?" she sighed. "I'm only learning my A B C's. I can't play the piano or the ukulele, or paint even water colors, or talk books or politics or anything much."

"What an ideal wife!" he said, and then blurted out his hope: "Will you be my wife and go west with me?"

He could see her eyes widen like two tiny moons. When he slipped his arms about her she gulped a deep breath of rapture and leaned into his bosom for a moment. But as he tightened his clasp she broke loose sharply and fairly barked at him, with a minimum of her new delicacy: "I should say not!"

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THEN she ran into the house and up the stairs. She had remembered just in time that Walt belonged to Pamela by right of discovery, preemption and devotion.

Pamela was waiting for her; stared at her; exclaimed: "What on earth has happened to you? You are positively beautiful. What is that strange light in your eyes?"

"I don't know," said Idalene. And she did not know, could not know that it was the benediction of self-sacrifice.

It was only when she was alone that Idalene realized how alone she was; how much it meant to give up the man whom her humble worship had made great and whose love was the uttermost honor she could even dream.

She took off her borrowed finery, and was herself again, a poor, lonesome thing, loverless, husbandless, childless for the rest of her days.

A frenzy seized her and she resolved to wait no longer. She found her suit case in a closet, stuffed into it all the things she had brought, and dressed herself in the shabby gown that had walked with her into this foreign Eden.

She wrote a little letter:

Dearest Miss Pamela: You have been a heaven-sent angle to me. But I don't belong in heaven. You love Dr. Breen. You couldn't help it. So, I will take myself out of your life and his. Fairwel forever. Your loving, greatful, IDALENE.

Idalene set this document on a bureau in an envelope addressed to Pamela, and slipped out of the house by the servants' stairs, and trudged, unnoticed, along the roads to the far-away station. It was not yet daylight when she opened the old front gate in Calverly. She tiptoed up the walk and the front steps and found the front door locked.

When her brother came, barefooted, shirtless and tousled to the door for the morning paper, whose thumping arrival had not wakened Idalene, his eyes rivaled the yawn of his mouth as he made her out in the hammock. He went and told his mother, who was clattering away in the kitchen: "Idalene's home."

His mother had to go see with her own eyes. The girl was so newly pretty and so winsome that Mrs. Nobbin sighed:

"Let the poor thing have her sleep out."

Pamela also slept gracefully and woke with a smile. But on this morning she was still so drugged with sleep when Ninette ran in to wake her with the news and the letter of Idalene's departure that she could not understand its reference to her love of Dr. Breen.

Later she understood it, for on her way to breakfast she saw Walt's baggage going down the hall in the grip of two of the menservants. And Walt followed, dressed for travel.

"What on earth!" she cried.

"I'm going west," he explained. "I've got to. Had a telegram. No, that's a lie, but I've got to go back. I came east to ask you to go with me, but—well, the fact is, Pam, you're too fine for me. You're a glorious, brilliant, darling creature and I haven't got the heart to drag you out to that plain, rough country."

Her heart leaped to say: "I'm tired of all this. I long for all that. Take me with you."

But she could not force herself upon him. So she gave him up with a smile. Then she sighed:

"Idalene's already gone, poor little soul."

Walt was still sore enough and tactless enough to snarl:

"Poor little nothing! I asked her to be my wife last night, and she nearly snapped my head off."

Pamela thought of this all through breakfast. Then the truth of it came to her. She saw that Idalene had broken her heart to keep from breaking Pamela's. She said to Walt:

"Before you go west you're going to motor over to Calverly with me to tell Idalene good-by. It's a long ride, but you can pick up your train there."

Walt was stubborn, but she was stubborner. On the way over she explained the situation to him in her own way with a miserly economy of truth. She said nothing about her own interest in the affair, but laid all the blame on Idalene's notorious meekness:

"She adores you, and she doesn't think herself worthy of your godlike wealth of fascinations and dollars. So she ran away. You take one good look at her in the daylight, and if you can't read it in her eyes, then I'm a liar and you can go on about your business without being bothered by either of us."

* * * *

WHEN they reached the Nobbin home, they found Mrs. Nobbin out in the side yard casting bread upon her chickens. Pamela hung back and pushed Walt forward. Before he could ask where Idalene was he heard her voice. She was singing. He caught a glimpse of her at the kitchen window.

She was in an apron, and her arms were white with flour, but she was more graceful in her gingham than she had once been in the satin confection of "Ye L'Art Shoppe." Her song was sad but eerily sweet.

When she caught sight of him she thrust her head out of the window and hailed him with a "Hello" that was ambrosial with welcome.

All he could say was "Hello!"

She leaned her elbows on the sill and said: "Well, the wallflower has come back to the wall."

"Not for long," he groaned, then he reached up and plucked her. He caught her two hands and dragged her squealing right through the window and caught her in his arms, and hugged her so hard that neither of them heard her mother indulging in amazed profanity: "Land sakes to goodness!"

Neither of them heeded the racket of the panic-stricken poultry. Neither of them saw that Pamela's eyes were now enriched with the divine light of self-sacrifice. The rich simply get everything away from the poor.

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Cave-Dwelling Snakes.

UNTIL recent times no reptiles were known to have adapted themselves to existence in the darkness of caverns. Now, however, it is known that in the Malay peninsula a snake, a species of coluber, inhabits certain caverns, feeding upon the bats.

These cave-dwelling snakes attain a length of between eight and nine feet. Their coloring simulates that of the walls of the caverns. The rock is a yellowish limestone, traversed with blackish veins, and these markings and colors are curiously reproduced in the snakes, many of which lurk on the ledges in the semi-darkness near the entrances, watching for the bats.

Fire From Friction.

IT is well known that some savage tribes are accustomed to obtain fire by the friction of dry wood, but white men trying the experiment usually fail. The method used by a native Indian tribe, the Yanadis of Madras Presidency, is described by an English officer in that place.

In a short stick a square cavity is made. The stick is then laid on the ground and held firmly in place by one operator, while another rapidly twirls between his hands a longer stick, one end of which rests in the cavity. From the fire thus produced dry leaves or a rag can be ignited.

Seasoned Timber.

EXPERIMENTS made by the United States forest service have demonstrated that thoroughly air-dried timber has about double the strength of green timber. Moroever, in order effectively to apply preservative agents to timber, it must be first seasoned, because it is very difficult to inject antiseptics into green wood. The loss of weight by seasoned timber is quite surprising. Western pine loses half its weight after three to five months' seasoning.